

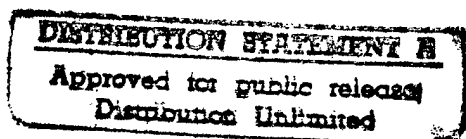
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PROMOTIONS AMONG THE RANKS:  
A FOCUS ON BLACK MILITARY OFFICERS

by

Barbara C. Sutton  
Lt Col, USAF



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Advisor: Colonel Charles B. Jones

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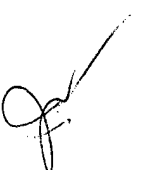
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## **ABSTRACT**

**TITLE:** Promotions Among the Ranks: A Focus on Black Military Officers

**AUTHOR:** Barbara C. Sutton, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF, NC

The purpose of the paper is to review the promotion trends of black officers in the Air Force. Recently the Air Force and other military services have been receiving extensive scrutiny and complaints about unfair promotion systems. A 1994 congressional investigation concluded that racial discrimination still existed in the military. Black military personnel complained that they received deficient evaluations and lacked prominent promotable positions. Many allegations by other groups revealed charges brought against supervisors and senior leaders, accusing them of cronyism, preferential treatment, as well as tampering and influencing boards. A review of the promotions trends for the past two decades indicated that black officers' promotion rates are disproportionate to white candidates and board averages. Additionally, senior military officers expressed their opinions about the promotion disparities among black officers. The conclusion from the review was there is a vast disparity of promotion board results in the Air Force as they relate to black officers. However, top Air Force military leaders have taken notable and spontaneous actions to eradicate the problem by revamping the evaluation process and establishing strong policies.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Lieutenant Colonel Barbara C. Sutton (Bachelor, Science of Nursing, Tulsa University, Tulsa, Oklahoma; Masters, Science of Nursing, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas) is a black Air Force military officer with 19 years of military service. She maintains over 1,200 flying hours as a flight nurse and served as chief nurse administrator and liaison officer to the reserves at HQ 10 AF, Bergstrom Air Force Base, Texas. She has always been intrigued with the Air Force promotion system and its implications for minorities and women in the military. The wide disparity of promotion results from the October 1994 Majors board rekindled her concerns in the promotion systems and future promotion systems as they might impact the structure and its diversity. She is a graduate of Air War College, class of 1995.

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## PRELUDE

*Even assuming that large-scale political upheaval is averted, we are bound to witness a difficult period of growing public alienation from the political process, rising racial tensions and unrest in the inner cities, partisan and ideological acrimony, deepening social divisions, escalating violence among the young, political radicalism on our campuses, one-term presidents, and breathtaking political turmoil.<sup>1</sup>*

Once again, racial disagreement and disharmony capture headlines and becomes a major American concern.<sup>2</sup> Racial issues have turned into an everyday media premier. For instance, every time folks turn on their televisions or pick up newspapers or magazines, they are inundated with mind boggling finger pointing, blaming and racial controversies. The mounting mass media debates seem only to ignite more debates. It is difficult not to be drawn by the sensational sound bites and big bold print. Reflect back and recall the rising racial tensions during the L.A. riots of 1992,<sup>3</sup> the daily coverage of the O. J. Simpson trials, the political dialogue intertwined with building orphanages, the welfare/joblessness, illegitimacy and crime and the recent clash of racial disturbances on college campuses. Not surprisingly, there is strong indication that Affirmative Action will be a leading 1996 Presidential Campaign issue. To add fuel to the fire, the book entitled *The Bell Curve* placed this country on edge and hit raw nerves. This book implies that IQ is largely inherited and that Blacks have a lower group IQ than other races and a radically different level of ability. These sensational controversies hit as intensively provoking and damaging, regardless of facts, fair play or sensitivity.

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<sup>1</sup> Porter, Bruce, D., *America and the Twenty-First Century: Will America Democracy Survive?*

Current, January 1994, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Leo, John, "The Unmaking of Civil Culture", *U.S. News & World Report*, Vol., 118, No. 6, Feb 13, 1995, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Porter, 26.

Irony, but the debates appear so chaotic and ridiculous at times because racial indifference is an awkward subject to discuss openly, as well as a difficult charge to prove. The matter commonly causes bitterness, confusion, anger and in many cases intensify biases. Consequently, the effects unfortunately support the thrust of widening social polarization.

On the other hand, maybe this debate monstrosity is a necessary demon for America. Just maybe the country needs to confront these hard hitting issues and keep them in the limelight. Perhaps these debates could be the catalyst for positive changes. But, in lieu of history, is this being realistic or only wishful thinking?

Without a doubt, the U.S. has entered the season of sharpened internal strains of which the country may be severely divided along partisan, class, ethnic, gender and ideological lines as it once was in the 1850's.<sup>4</sup> Like it or not, the arguments and the debates prevail and will continue to prevail for a considerable time. Whether based on one's past or one's beliefs and philosophy, it is difficult not to take sides. Regardless of the stance, the likely outcome of where one stands customarily relates to where one sits.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 28.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

*An Air Force devoid of significant opportunities for blacks is not the type of Air Force we want.*<sup>5</sup>

The end of the Cold War opened the doors to a flood of uncertainties for the national security of the United States. As this country now diverts attention away from the communistic, monolithic and nuclear threat, the movement of nonmilitary threats race to the forefront. Now, the domestic challenges of racial issues, economics, competition, crime and environmental pollution preoccupy America.<sup>6 7</sup> These phenomena are not necessarily new, but the crisis of national awareness and the sense of separate identity will exacerbate many of them in wayward ways. For instance, after every major war this century, racial tensions worsened.<sup>8</sup> Even today, the race phenomenon prevails as the number one domestic issue.<sup>9</sup> If only to a small degree, it is probably fair to imply that Corporate America faces similar concerns and problems. One such organization certainly includes the U.S. Armed Forces. In lieu of recent congressional investigations and the military's increased focus on minority issues and promotions, these disparities show no signs of abating. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the promotion trends of black officers in the Air Force, review black officers' grievances

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<sup>5</sup> Confidential personal letter written by a colonel to an HQ USAF general officer, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Ellis, James E., "Where Troop Cuts Will be Cruellest for Blacks; The Services Have Been the Best Employer Around," Business Week, June 8, 1992, 72-73.

<sup>7</sup> Moskos, Charles C., "Mandating Inclusion: The Military as a Social Lab," Current, July/August 1993, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Porter, 26.

<sup>9</sup> Zuckerman, Mortimer B., "Fixing Affirmative Action," U.S. News and World Report, Vol. 118, No. 11, March 20, 1995, 112.

and to assess if black officers maintain a legitimate cause for complaint against the Air Force promotion system.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BACKGROUND

Blacks have fought in American wars since colonial times. The segregation practice they endured from the Civil War lasted until it was finally abolished by President Truman in 1948. Since the establishment of the all-volunteer force, the number of blacks in the military has risen substantially. Even though racial problems seemed to subside after the all-volunteer force implementation, in 1976 the Department of Defense concluded racial discrimination existed and continued to exist in all military branches.<sup>10</sup>

A study by Brink and Louis in the early 60's reported that blacks perceived the military as more an equalitarian with a better chance for training and promotions than civilian society.<sup>11</sup> But during the Vietnam era, attitude surveys suggested that black and white military personnel consistently held conflicting views on racial issues in the armed forces.<sup>12</sup>

In 1971, a destructive race riot occurred at Travis Air Force Base, California, leaving one individual dead. Subsequently, several riot eruptions followed at other bases throughout the country.<sup>13</sup>

Ironically, prior to the riots Colonel Lucias Theus had recently completed a military study, indicating a need for a race relations program in the armed forces. However, the Air Force ignored the plan,

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<sup>10</sup> Northrup, Herbert R., Blacks and Other Minorities: Participation the All-Volunteer Navy and Marine, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Wharton, School, 1979), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Brink, William & Harris, Louis, Black and White, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966), 162.

<sup>12</sup> Harries-Jenkins, Gwyn, and Moskos, Charles C., "Armed Forces and Society," Current Sociology (London: Sage Pub, Vol. 29, No. 3, Winter 81), 35.

<sup>13</sup> Donaldson, Gary A., The History of African-Americans in the Military, (Malabar, Florida, Krieger Publishing Company, 1991), 170.

convinced that racial tension in the military was abating and that racial problems in the Air Force were minimal."<sup>14</sup> One month later, after the riot, the Air Force put the Theus study into action.

Even now, black military related issues and complaints have been written in the Air Force Times, weekly, concerning some form of discrimination or unfairness. But in review of recent Armed Forces journals, many military career fields are firing charges of unfairness, with emphasis on promotions and job retention. This raises the question as to what attributes prompted discriminatory charges to resurface again in the military. So, why the fuss now, considering for decades the military excelled as a national leader in providing equal opportunities for all? Could it be a cyclical ephemeral phase falling in line with the national vogue for special interest claims of rights violations or could it simply be that the problems never really went away, but merely continued to fester?

Nevertheless, blacks advancing in the military have occurred substantially in the past two decades. This is due to the military devoting time and money into the race relation problem.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, many blacks continue to question the fairness of the promotion system, by alluring to weak performance evaluations, non-promotable positions, and limited training opportunities such as Professional Military School in resident;<sup>16</sup> focusing on the playing field as it relates to careers. However, considering the statistics of blacks occupying more managerial positions in the military than blacks in business, education, journalism, government or any other significant sector of in U.S society, inherently steers many to question the gripe of black officers.<sup>17 18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>15</sup> Holmes, Steven A, "Time and Money Producing Racial Harmony in Military", New York Times, 5 April 1995, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Confidential letter, 1987.

<sup>17</sup> Billingsley, Andrew, Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African-American Families, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992)

<sup>18</sup> Kitfield, James, "Blacks in the Military," Government Executive, February 1994, 36.

In Fall 1993, the House Armed Services Committee Chairman Representative Ronald V. Dellums, D-California, established the bipartisan Task Force on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, after receiving numerous complaints about inequality in the military.<sup>19</sup> The bipartisan investigation proceeded for approximately one year and in December 1994 the report concluded that minorities throughout the military felt mistreated, believing that promotions, assignments and discipline were conducted with racial bias.<sup>20</sup> The committee reported undercurrent racial tensions throughout the military, inferring minorities complained about subtle, career-damaging discrimination. A constant complaint among minorities, who perceived that career-boosting assignments and training were provided in discriminatory ways stated that the actions were too subtle to be proven.<sup>21</sup> The report's conclusions were based on the interviews of over 2,000 people assigned to 19 bases.

### **Black Representation In The Military**

Although blacks make up 12 percent of the U.S. population, they hold 21 percent of all military positions.<sup>22</sup> Statistics reveal that blacks are under-represented in the officer ranks and over-represented in the enlisted ranks. Note the following on Table 1 and 2 and Figure 1.

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<sup>19</sup> Kitfield, James, Blacks in the Military, Government Executive, February 1994, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Maze, Rick, "Report: Racism in the Military Continues, Air Force Times, 9 Jan 1995, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Maze, Rick, "Report: Racism in Military Continues," Air Force Times, No. 23, January 9, 1995, p.4.

<sup>22</sup> Ellis, 72.

TABLE 1

**BLACK OFFICERS REPRESENTATION PERCENTAGES<sup>23</sup>**

<u>GRADE</u>	<u>Air Force</u>	<u>ARMY</u>	<u>NAVY</u>	<u>MARINES</u>
Gen/Adm	2.0	6.5	1.7	0
Col/Capt	2.1	4.9	1.7	2.9
Lt Col/Cdr	4.9	8.3	3.2	3.9
Maj/Lt Cdr	7.4	12.5	3.7	4.0
Capt/Lt	5.5	12.4	5.2	4.8
Lt/Lt JG & Ens	5.6	11.5	7.0	6.0

TABLE 2

**BLACK OFFICERS REPRESENTATION IN THE ARMED FORCES<sup>24</sup>**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Army	9,816	11.3
Navy	3,100	4.0
Marines	989	5.4
<u>Air Force</u>	<u>4,594</u>	<u>5.6</u>
<b>Total DoD</b>	<b>18,499</b>	<b>7.4</b>

**BLACK ENLISTEES REPRESENTATION IN THE ARMED FORCES**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Army	142,787	30.5
Navy	73,675	17.8
Marine	27,277	17.5
<u>Air Force</u>	<u>58,527</u>	<u>16.8</u>
<b>Total DoD</b>	<b>302,266</b>	<b>21.8</b>

\* As of 30 April 1994.

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<sup>23</sup> Holmes, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Defense Almanac 94, Issue 5, U.S. Government Printing Office Jacket No. 300-734-40008. ISSN 0737-1217, 8.

### Key Statistical Facts

1. **Black officers makeup 5.6 percent of the Air Force Officer Corps. However, blacks advancements in ranks are disproportionate to their presence in the service.<sup>25</sup> Figure 1 represents the comparison.** From a proportionate point of view, one would expect at least 5.6 percent of senior officers to be black. Instead, black lieutenant colonels, colonels and generals compared by proportion to ranks, 4.9, 2.1 and 2.0 percent respectively, reveal a continuous decline in representation with each advancement.<sup>26</sup> The Air Force is comprised of 297 general officers, however, black representations of general officers at 2 percent are significantly lower.
2. **Empirical analyses reflect lower past promotion rates of black officers relative to white officers in the Air Force.<sup>27</sup>** Refer to Figures 2, 3, and 4 for comparison. Most disturbing is that although the percentage of colonels illustrates some higher percentages for promotions over the years, but these results are attributed to a concentration of lower numerical representation of black lieutenant colonels eligible to meet those boards.
3. **The gap between black majors and lieutenant colonels as compared to colonels widen inexplicably from 1986 to 1992 (Table 3).<sup>28</sup> With FY86**

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<sup>25</sup> Holmes, Stevens A., Time and Money Producing Racial Harmony in Military, New York Times, Current News Early Bird, American Forces Information Service, 1.

<sup>26</sup> "How the Air Force is Organized" Air Force Magazine, V.77, No. 5, May 1994.

<sup>27</sup> Promotion Statistics, Personnel Analysis Branch, Headquarters Air Force Military Personnel Center, 27 Dec 1994.

<sup>28</sup> United States Air Force Statistical Digest, Fiscal Year 1992, Washington, D.C., Assistant Secretary of the Air Force, Financial Management and Comptroller, D-69.

and FY87 being exceptions, slightly, there is a negative correlation between field grades and colonel (as the major and lieutenant colonel ranks increased the colonel ranks decreased). Most significant is that increase growth of majors over years has the appearance of the "choke point". Note Figure 1.



**TABLE 3**

[Not included]

## CHAPTER THREE

### IS MILITARY RACIAL ISSUES A MICROCOSM OF CIVILIANS?

As the world undergoes rapid changes, an array of challenges will face today's leaders. One challenge appears to be charges of preferential treatment for some and not for others. Almost one decade ago, professors of military sociology hypothesized that as the military services become more like civilian organizations, blacks' perceptions of discrimination in the military will become similar and resemble those in society.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, they claimed that the patterns of race relations within the military will gravitate and become reflective of the civilian sector.<sup>30</sup>

In the last two to three years, the armed forces received a great deal of scrutiny and complaints concerning problems of discrimination, reverse discrimination, inequality and unfairness. Numerous complainants charged the flawed promotion system as the argument for their claims<sup>31</sup>. In review of recent Armed Forces journals, nearly every military career field fired charges of unfairness, especially with an emphasis on promotions and job eliminations. Blacks expressed feelings of relative deprivation stemming from perceived racial problems and referred to the dipping promotion rates as an example.<sup>32</sup>

Other categories of complainants standing at the forefront contesting the promotion systems consisted of the enlisted force, females, navigators, passed over officers and selected early retirement boards (SERB) candidates. Each group alleged unfairness and frequently cited the power structure and favoritism as the obstacle for advancement. Nonetheless, the promotion system of nearly every military service is now under the umbrella of scrutiny.

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<sup>29</sup> Butler, John Sibley, "Race Relations in the Military", The Military History, Washington, Pergamon-Brassey Publications, 1988), 121.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 126.

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<sup>32</sup> Harris-Jenkins, Gwyn, & Moskos, 35.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CRONYSM: LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

The charges of preferential treatment in the military come surprisingly to many in society and even many in the military. It is not a surprise that senior executives and leaders are in a quandary how to handle such a perplex, sensitive and frustrating matter, especially when it points to them as part of the problem, if not the problem. A clear illustration is the unraveling difficulty and preferential charges coming from an array of people throughout the military, and the focus on leadership integrity.

Cynicism among the troops is high as the Air Force endures scandalous accusations for preserving an unfair promotion system. Some charges involve leaders influences, favoritism and tampering. The Lieutenant General Buster C. Glosson, Deputy Chief of Staff, Plans and Operations case, is an example of promotion boards tampering allegations.<sup>33</sup> Secretary of the Air Force Sheila E. Widnall requested a probe after three prospective board members of the Major Generals promotion board complained that General Glosson communicated improperly with them about a promotion candidate.<sup>34</sup> This incident was just one of many bombshells falling at military leaders doors.

Just one year prior to this incident, another Senate investigation occurred in 1992 when the committee denounced the Air Force promotion system as cronyism and of being influenced by the good old boy system.<sup>35</sup> The investigation centered on widespread allegations of senior raters improperly considering nonperformance related information, such as civilian education, professional military education (PME) and additional duties in performance evaluations. They were accused of

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<sup>33</sup> Compart, Andrew, "Command Influence Over Promotions is Under Scrutiny," Air Force Times, Dec 27, 1993, 3 and 17.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 15.

using mini-boards to group rank officers from best to worst. These acts were violations of Air Force directives. The central selection boards that meets at the Air Force military personnel center could only consider all these factors. However, as of March 1995, the Air Force reversed this directive and decided that information such as PME, education and etc., could be considered.

Amidst the allegation of corruption and complaints of wide spread irregularity, and as a result of the General Glosson scandal, the Senate Armed Services Committee renewed its investigations into the maligned Air Force promotion system. In lieu of the continuous inquires and validation of some charges, these allegations casted doubt on the integrity of the Air Forces past and present leaders.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FACTORS CREDITED WITH REAWAKENING THE RACIAL DISPARITY ISSUE

*Equal opportunity must be a fundamental part of our efforts to maintain American military strength in a changing world. During the current hiring freeze within the Department of Defense and the planned restructuring of the military departments and defense agencies, we must make every effort to avoid any disproportionate impact on any group and to continue the progress that has made this Department a model employer in this nation.*<sup>36</sup>

Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, April 17, 1990

One of the recent factors credited with reawakening the racial disparity concerns in the military was General Carl Mundy's, Commandant, Marine Corps interview on *60 Minutes*. The general stirred a military inequality issue which laid dormant for nearly a decade when he added fuel to the fire with his statement about blacks in the Marines not being proportionately capable as white Marines. He also maintained that racism did not exist in the Marines and attributed the disproportionate promotion rates to disparities in performance.<sup>37</sup>

The general's nationally televised remarks instantly ignited rumbling and conflicts among the forces. Interestingly, even though studies reveal most blacks perceive some discrimination in the Armed Forces, findings do indicate black Marines perceive considerably less discrimination on the average than those in other services.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps these findings can be attributed to the Marines' traditional structure on group solidarity and commitment to the Corps.

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<sup>36</sup> Black Americans in Defense of Our Nations, (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense) Remarks by Secretary Cheney Signing the Human Goals Charter for Military and Civilian Personnel, 1991), 6.

<sup>37</sup> Kitfield, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Butler and Holmes, 173.

A **second** reason accounting for racial concerns in the military is the changing structure.<sup>39 40</sup> Alteration in attitudes and behaviors always follows structural changes. As the military become more occupational verses war fighting, race relations will closely intersect with civilian life. This certainly will impact the military social equilibrium as well.

Furthermore, the shape cuts planned in U.S. defense spending over the next few years are raising a disturbing prospect for the promotions in the military. In lieu of this matter, civil rights leaders voiced concerns that minorities will suffer disproportionately from the Defense Department's on-going manpower squeeze. They feared the scale down will effect the contractors of the very institution that was the most successful in integrating and elevating blacks and other minorities.<sup>41 42</sup>

In actuality, the reality of the drastic military downsizing has speared the fears within all races, sexes and career fields. Fears are anticipated to surface as a result of unpredictability and potential job security losses. Consequently, one unfortunate side effect of downsizing will elevate competition for job assignments and promotions. As the armed forces continue restructuring, the perceived sense of inequality is foreseen to become more pervasive among many groups.

A **third** matter rests with blacks perceptions of a consistently disproportionate promotion rates of blacks. A good example is illustrated by the CY 1994 Majors promotion board. See Figure 6. The low promotion percentage for black captains to majors disturbed many black senior officers throughout the force. Of that board, comprised of a grand total of 2891 first time candidates eligible for promotion, 2098 were selected for promotion (72.6 percent) overall. This statistic indicates a total of

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<sup>39</sup> Butler, 122.

<sup>40</sup> Butler, 121.

<sup>41</sup> Porter, 26.

793 candidates passed over. Black captains considered for promotion, comprised of 201 candidates (7.0 percent representation). Of these black captains, 133 (66.2 percent) were selected for promotion and 68 (33.8 percent) were passed over. Henceforth, of all passed over first time candidates for major, 8.6 percent were blacks. In comparison, white candidates meeting the board, represented an overall promotion percentage of 73.3 percent (1876 of 2560) and a passover rate of only 26.7 percent (684 of 2560).

A **forth** concern is the low visibility of senior black officers throughout the Air Force. As the disproportionate trend continues, the military stagnates in a peculiar position. It still remains a novelty for the promotion of black officers to the ranks of general. When the Air Force generals nomination promotion list was announced February 1995, there were 67 individuals selected to receive their first and second stars. However, pictured in the Air Force Times article was only one general officer's photo; Major General (Sel) Marcelite Jordan-Harris, the first and only black female ever promoted to general officership in the active Air Force<sup>43</sup>. As one lieutenant colonel quoted, "It's almost the twenty-first century. Why are we still making history?"

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<sup>42</sup> Ellis, 28.

<sup>43</sup> "Senate Gets List", Air Force Times, Vol.55, No. 29, 20 February, 1995, 4.



## CHAPTER SIX

### SENIOR OFFICERS VIEWS ON BLACKS PROMOTIONS

For some time now, many senior black officers argued that blacks actually lost ground in the past decade and claimed the inequitable representation served as one measurement to validate it. The "terrible eighties promotions" occurred during the Reagan Administration era (note inverted bell-shaped graphs in figures 6, 7 and 8).

One active duty colonel, who eventually became a general officer, wrote a letter to a HQ USAF general officer expressing concerns about blacks and their perceptions in the Air Force. The colonel declared that this topic repeatedly surfaced during speaking engagements. An insert from the letter follows:

The first issue of Blacks in the Air Force is focused in three areas; the perceived lack of promotions for Black officers; the perceived lack of Blacks in prominent promotable positions; the perceived deficient performance reports for our Black officers. Junior officers, senior officers, and senior enlisted Black personnel express dismay that no Black has been promoted to the flag ranks in three years. Senior Black officers feel stymied by their inability to attain meaningful job assignments. Company grade Black officers talk about their less-than-sterling Officer Effectiveness Reports and the non-selection for promotion of their contemporaries. The company grade officers are afraid and the senior Black officers are frustrated. The former seeks career counseling and guidance, but find themselves in a position that is not at all enviable. Senior ranking Black officers counsel the young in a positive, up-beat manner; but among themselves they express their concern about their futures and the futures of young Black officers.

We, the senior Black officers, have a feeling of nowhere to turn and can offer no positive proof that what appears to be discriminatory is merely a perception and a consequence of the times that is happening to all races. The Social Action offices of the Air Force no longer have the clout or the action they once had.

Consequently, institutional and individual racism seems to be creeping back into the Air Force. I seriously doubt that we will see the turmoil of the early seventies, for the impact of this "racism" is affecting officers. We, as officers, are too loyal to mutiny as

our young Blacks once did. But this does not negate the unrest among Blacks that is vocalized to me when I visit bases.<sup>44</sup>

Remarkably, another black general officer wrote a letter to HQ USAF immediately following a 1989 Captain promotion board and stated:

For the past six years, the promotion rates for black officers to the grades of captain through colonel have lagged significantly behind the Air Force average. This paints a very dismal picture for our service, and calls into question our commitment to keep black officers as a viable population in our officer corps. Only once in this six year period have blacks met or exceeded the Air Force average selection rate to any of these grades, and that was in 1985 when blacks achieved a 46 percent selection rate to colonel versus an Air Force average of 44 percent. . . . The end result of these poor selection rates is very visible today. If we continue to pass over disproportionate numbers of blacks, we will ensure that blacks will have few, if any opportunities to compete for senior leadership positions in the Air Force. Today, we have only 99 black colonels out of a force of about 5,500 colonels; and of those 99, fewer than 10 are in promotable positions. An Air Force devoid of significant opportunities for blacks is not the type of Air Force that either of us wants. . . .<sup>45</sup>

A review of the statistics for this period, as stated by the general is correctly reflective of his concerns. The captain boards, which usually offer 100 percent promotional opportunities, were grave. See Figure 5 for an overall view of these boards are illustrated in Table 4. The table also indicates that the percentage of black officers promotion overall rates compared to the overall Air Force rates differed with a span of 2 to 19 percent (marking the number 19 occurring three times). Interestingly, 15 of 22 of these boards illustrated a percentage difference of 10 or more.

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<sup>44</sup> Confidential personal letter written to HQ USAF general officer, 8 May 1987.

<sup>45</sup> Personal letter, 1989.

TABLE 4

## 1984 - 1989 PROMOTION RATES

CY	Captain		Major		Lt Colonel		Colonel	
	AF	BL	AF	BL	AF	BL	AF	BL
1989	97	92	84	70	64	49	44	41
1988	96	91	83	67	No Board		No Board	
1987	96	92	82	63*	62	49	43	41
1986	96	88	80	66	62	45	43	30
1985	93	82	79	60*	61	43	44	46
1984	93	82	78	65	62	49	44	25*

AF = Overall Board Rates

BL = Black Overall Rates

RATES Expressed In Percentage

\* = Percentage of 19 points difference HQ AFMPC/DPMYAP

### **Board Members Points of Views**

When a white female colonel board member of the October 1994 majors promotions board was asked to provide her perceptions about Blacks' disproportionate promotion rates for that board, she stated that it was too difficult to pin down specify reasons because of the varied factors involved for all candidates<sup>46</sup>. The colonel did recall a few blacks records and stated that their Officer Performance Reports (OPRs) at the start of their careers (the first one to three OPRs) were usually weaker, but drastically improved with exceptional OPRs on top. With the boards being so competitive and so many sterling records, she implied that the early borderline OPRs probably impacted the overall scores. Even though, the board included official photographs, the colonel stated she didn't perceive the photos as a real factor with the promotion disparity. However, she expressed regret about the January 1995 decision to remove photos from the records. The colonel stated the photo gave the records "personality".

In another interview with a black male colonel, who had served on several promotion boards, he conceded the problems he observed being the greatest differential among black records, consisted of weakly written OPRs earlier in their careers and failure to fill promotable job assignments and positions.<sup>47</sup> In lieu of keen competition, from this colonel's point of view, these factors significantly precipitated to the preponderance of the damage for black officers promotions.

Just as voiced previously, the black colonel expressed regret about the official photos being extracted from the records, fearing the removal diminishes the whole person concept. Interestingly, he further stated that with the removal of the photos, the promotions for black officers could conceivable

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<sup>46</sup> Personal interview with a 1994 Majors Promotion board member, 10 March 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Personal interview with an active duty colonel, 15 February 1995

decline even further. Both colonels explicitly praised the central board process and referenced it as being extremely fair and "practically flawless".

During a telephone interview with a black female colonel, who had never set a promotion board, she recalled the time when she was a first lieutenant.<sup>48</sup> On the Colorado base where she was assigned, there were 34-35 black first and second lieutenants. Of these lieutenants, only one lieutenant received an overall top rating of "1" on their Officer Effectiveness Report. She stated the base commander was so upset, he ordered an external investigation from HQ USAF, Washington, DC.

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<sup>48</sup> Telephone conversation with a black female colonel, December 1994.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE WHOLE PERSON CONCEPT

*I am mindful, too, that the struggle is not yet over. There is still racial intolerance in this Nation. The challenge is still before us. We have to remember the past. We must continue the struggle until all barriers have fallen—a struggle until achievement and recognition in our society are based principally on performance.*<sup>49</sup>

General Colin L. Powell  
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

Promotion to a higher rank is based on the whole person concept.<sup>50</sup> Information routinely used to promote individuals consists of job performance, leadership proficiency, professional qualities, breath of experience, job responsibility, academic and professional military education and other factors.

#### Some Significant Factors Effecting Black Officers Promotions

**Officer Performance Reports (OPR):** Duty performance is the most important factor in promotions. Officer Performance Reports serve as the primary criteria for assignment selections and shaping initial career patterns.<sup>51</sup> One low performance rating can significantly damage ones career. For instance, an early mark down or less than glowing report as a lieutenant or captain often effect the individual's entire military opportunity.<sup>52</sup> The results can produce further crippling outcomes as the promotion system does not make allowance for late bloomers. The effect is especially noted during

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<sup>49</sup> Black Americans in Defense of Our Nation, Department of Defense), Washington, D.C: 1991) 7.

<sup>50</sup> Promotion of Active Duty List Officers, Department of Air Force, Air Force Reg 36-89, April 1992, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Stewart, James, B. and Firestone, "Looking for a Few Good Men: Predicting Patterns of Retentions, Promotions, and Accession of Minority and Women Officers," American Journal of Economics and Sociology, Vol. 5, No.4, (October 1992), 439.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 440.

selection to Intermediate or Senior Service School. Henceforth, one bad OPR can destroy an officer's potential developmental pattern and growth.

**Job specialty:** Blacks are over-represented in the administration and supply fields and under-represented in technical jobs that offer the chances for promotion.<sup>53</sup> In conjunction, the absolute number of black officers is already low and limited mass size decreases their representation at higher levels of command.<sup>54</sup> Most interesting is that black males, in the ranks of major and lieutenant colonel are the most under-promoted racial category.<sup>55</sup> Actually, of 55 promotion boards (officers and enlisted) held 1987-1991, the black male fell below the board average 52 times<sup>56</sup>.

**Assignments:** Too many non-promotable jobs can deny opportunities. As noted above, the results of OPRs influence the decisions on who earns future assignments, gets selected to staff jobs and gains promotions to higher ranks. The key goal is to acquire elite job assignments with increased responsibility, recognition's, staff positions and etc.,.

**Accession Route:** Another significant factor rests with the route minorities are often commissioned. Six to seven percent of Academy graduate are black officers.<sup>57</sup> Officers entering through the Academy, usually get a slight edge on advancement through the ranks. They also have a better chance of reaching the grade of general officer compared to candidates entering the Air Force

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 440.

<sup>54</sup> Willis, Grant, "Minorities Facing Promotion Discrimination," Air Force Times, February 15, 1993, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>57</sup> Carroll, Rodney D., & Cole, Philbert A., A Study of Black Officer Candidate Attrition in the United States Air Force, Department of Air Force, Air Force Institute of Technology, 1993, 26.

through ROTC or Officers Training School. Also, Academy cadets are likely to receive the more positive early officer performance reports.<sup>58</sup>

**Professional Military Education:** Selection for professional military schools in residence provides a strong edge for candidates. In lieu of past successes, it is probably safe to estimate that 95 to 100 percent of the officers attending Senior Service Schools in resident will achieve the rank of colonel or greater.

The largest category of officers representation in the Air Force and at the Senior Service School are pilots. However, if this select group of officers represents the "bright and the finest" and "tomorrow leaders", there is a clear indication of which career fields maintain the greater emphases as well as the power. See Figure 9.

Black officers represented 9.1 percent of the Air Command and Staff College, Class of 95 (54 of 587). The Air War College Class (AWC) of 95, comprised of 149 active duty Air Force, contained nine black U.S. officers. Even though blacks' attendance at the Air War College is proportionate to blacks in the Air Force Officers Corps (6 percent) there were no black pilots in that class. Table 5 and Figure 9 illustrate the list of the Air Force occupations for the AWC class of 95'.

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<sup>58</sup> Stewart & Firestone, 440.



TABLE 5

OCCUPATION	NUMBERS	NUMBER OF BLACK OFFICERS
PILOTS {OP CDR (4)}	54	0
SPACE, MISSILE	13	1
NAVIGATORS	11	1
MAINT/MUNITIONS	9	2
COMM-COMPUTERS	9	0
INTELLIGENCE	6	1
SECURITY POLICE	6	1
MISSION SUPPORT	5	0
CIVIL ENGINEER	4	0
ACQUISITION	3	1
LOGISTICS CDR	3	0
OPERATIONS SUPP	3	0
ATTORNEYS	2	0
CONTRACTING	3	0
ACADEMIC PROG	1	0
ATTORNEYS	2	0
CHAPLAINS	1	0
INSTRUCTOR	1	0
NURSE	1	1
PUBIC AFFAIRS	1	0
SPACE & MISSILE	2	0
SUPPLY	1	0
SUPPORT CDR	1	0
TRANSPORTATION	1	1
WEATHER	1	0
<u>WING CDR</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>
TOTAL	149	9

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **IMPLICATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

The racial disputes and complaints of discrimination show no signs of abating in the near future. As America engages in the shilling turmoil over racial concerns, the Department of Defense and top military leaders must ensure that equal opportunity and fairness prevail throughout the services. After all, the armed forces certainly possess the capability and can assert the weight. Besides, the military occupies the best position to deal with discrimination more so than the rest of society. It has done it before.

However, in lieu of congressional investigations of promotion irregularities and claims of unfairness, the Air Force must take quick action to recapture the people's faith in the promotion systems. With all the recent favorable changes they have implemented in the past few months, it looks like they are headed in the right direction. Nevertheless, still more must be done to ensure the best environment is fostered for everyone.

First, it is essential the Air Force succeed in gaining the sincere commitment of all senior military leaders. General Ronald R. Fogleman, Air Force Chief of Staff and other top military leaders vowed to take corrective actions to straighten out the beleaguered promotion system. They have gone on stages throughout DOD and pledged to correct the racial diversity issues charged by minorities. In lieu of recent events, such as the increased number of black general officers by 60 percent (5 to 8) within the past year and praises by black senior officers, grants them a fortune of trust these changes verify commitment.

Second, the Air Force must periodically convene independent evaluation teams to assess the soundness of the promotion system in order to maintain the great strives of ensuring a fair environment. Just like many others, black men and women of the military continue to believe that acts

of discrimination and prejudice in the services place their careers in jeopardy. The Air Force needs to continue to denounce partiality and preferential treatment and make adjustments to the promotions process as required. The aim is to eradicate patterns of discriminatory and bias practices. Understandably it will take some time, as it becomes a hard sell to convince people to change opinions. One such opinion is understanding that disparity in skills is not due to innate difference between the races, but rather to disadvantage backgrounds, economic and cultural differences.

Third as the Air Force revamps the Officers Evaluation System, they must find a way to ensure fairness to all individuals without abandoning any group or increasing racial tension. To do so would be detrimental and only intensify predicament and delay the success.

People much remember that the multifaceted approach to achieving equal opportunity has been imminently successful within the Department of Defense. No other institution has accomplished success as quickly with the diverse races as the military. This is why the military need to ensure that blacks have the opportunity to advance and command rather than demand.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Zuckerman, 112.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUSION

*My top priority as Secretary of the Air Force has been to put people first. The single most important issue in this effort is to make sure all Air Force people, regardless of their gender or race, have equal opportunities to build substantial and satisfying careers in the service. We want to create and foster an atmosphere that encourages our people to do their best, and our best people to rise to the top.*<sup>60</sup>

The Glosson case and other promotion problems created an atmosphere for individuals to question the integrity of military leaders. With congressional investigations, rhetoric and massive medial events, black officers appear skeptical, as similar to other categories of military people. Nevertheless, the armed services still sustain a disproportionate number of blacks. The concentration of the disparity of blacks representations in the officer ranks remains a concern.<sup>61 62</sup>

The perceptions expressed by many black senior, field grade and company grade officers is that there is a significant disparity in the promotion of black officers. Actually, all four services exhibit disparities among their minorities. There is belief that favoritism, cronyism and partiality are ingrained in the systems. Two notable discrepancies are in the selections for training programs, such as PME in resident and the appointment to non-promotable jobs. In lieu, of statistics, research and investigations and complaints, black officers certainly maintain a legitimate complaint against the Air Force promotion system.

The Pentagon plans to make far-reaching efforts to cushion the impact of blacks doing the downsizing. Even as the service use lower recruitment, early retirements, and voluntary and

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<sup>60</sup> Widnall, Sheila, Policy Letter From the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, June 1994.

<sup>61</sup> Ellis, 28

<sup>62</sup> Stewart and Firestone, 435.

involuntary departures to curve U.S. active duty, they need to ensure they increase or at least maintain the current percentage of blacks at current levels. There is no such thing as perfect promotion system. As long as evaluations and boards involve people, subjectivity will always play a part.

The Air Force possesses the power to command changes and it looks like they are headed in that direction. They may not be able to regulate attitudes, but it sure can regulate behavior. Our future and readiness depend on it. " An Air Force devoid of significant opportunities for blacks is not the type of Air Force we want."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Personal letter, 1989.

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